

THE STORY OF A BRACELET.

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# THE STORY OF A BRACELET.

## CHAPTER I.

### BECKY AND CARRY.

On a Saturday afternoon, in the middle of the month of May, the sunshine lay warm and bright on a very quaint corner of an ancient town. It was a short street of rather mean houses, terminating in one large grey house which must have been built more than a century ago, and had apparently undergone neither change nor decay. The place seemed quite deserted; now and again a breath of wind rustled the green fans of the chestnut trees which screened the old house from its poorer neighbors; but if it had not been for the sharp chirping of many birds the whole quarter would have seemed fast asleep.

All at once, in the midst of this drowsy silence, a clear young voice burst out gaily with a verse of an old song.

"O, Brignall banks are fresh and fair,  
And Greta woods are green;  
I'd rather rove with Edmund there  
Than reign our English queen."

On the second floor of the grey house there was a window protected by a little balcony of wrought iron, which contained some pots of brightly-colored geraniums and a box of mignonette. In the room lighted by this window there were some wooden chairs with rush seats, a high-backed sofa with a bolster at each end, and a square table covered with an excellent imitation of old flowered tapestry. In the middle of the cloth stood a quaint majolica pitcher filled with sweet plumes of lilac, and a girl of twenty, resting her arms upon the table, brought her face near the flowers, and lovingly drank in their perfume.

It was a brown face; the hair was a russet brown; the eyes, brown, too, were as clear as a wood-stream. She was not tall, but her head was prettily poised on her slender throat, and a blouse of fawn-colored cambrie did not disguise the outlines of a charming figure. A narrow scarf of soft scarlet silk was tied in a graceful bow at the neck; her waist-belt was fastened with a quaint old silver clasp, and she wore a black cashmere skirt. Everything about Becky Selwood was dainty and refined, and people always said that she understood the art of dressing well on small means.

She was not alone in the room, and her companion was the singer. She had sung with a cultivated voice and an abandon which betokened one who was accustomed to a concert-room. Miss Carry Lancaster's name had already appeared in newspaper advertisements and on posters, and at twenty-one she was talked of as rising rapidly in her profession. She had been studying abroad for two years, and had come back a resolute, up-to-date young woman, ready to front the world with unabashed gaze, and absolutely determined to succeed. A fine girl, above the average height, strong, well-built, with a healthy pink complexion, and an abundance of fair hair, she was always sure of attracting attention. Her small grey eyes were deeply set, and rather near together, and something in their expression contradicted the smile of the merry red mouth. These eyes, as sharp as needles, were watching her friend with the closest scrutiny.

Like Becky, she knew how to dress, and wore the colors that became her best. She had a well-fitting skirt of grey tweed, a fresh blue and white shirt, and a blue belt, and neck tie. A jewelled watch was tucked into the belt, and from it depended a bit of rich gold chain, and a heart-shaped locket, studded with pink coral and pearls, an ornament which Becky candidly admired.

She finished the verse of the song, laughed, and then clapped her hands to applaud herself.

"Encore, encore!" cried she gaily.

"No, no," Becky entreated. "Carry, you are too loud. We shall leave a crowd under the window."

"Where will the crowd come from? Look out, my child—there isn't a soul to be seen. May I not sing to the dicky-birds about Edmund?" demanded Miss Lancaster in an innocent voice.

"They don't want to hear you," Becky replied. "In a few minutes Martha will bring up tea. I wish you would sit down and be quiet."

"Anything to please you! I'll sit down at once, like Thackeray's Fanny, and 'bloom like a rose in the cane-bottomed chair.' It's a rush-bottomed chair, fortunately, and will bear any weight. I am not a sylph like yourself."

She sat down on the other side of the table, and Becky screened her face behind the lilac.

"Now don't preserve an obstinate silence," went on Carry, after a brief pause. "Let me, just for once, have a glimpse of your inner self. The outer self I know very well, and it is quite pretty enough to—"

"Do be quiet," Becky implored. "I hate to be questioned when I have nothing to tell."

"Then Edmund de Warrenne has not said anything worth remembering, I suppose. Becky dear, you mustn't forget that we are old friends; at school you always confided in me, you know. If I seem inquisitive now, it is only because I'm really fond of you."

Carry had suddenly dropped her light jesting tone, and spoke earnestly. She had shifted her seat so that she could see her companion's face.

"I've been knocking about in the world, Becky, and I know more of men and women than you do. I couldn't help noticing you, dear, and I thought I saw that you liked Edmund Warrenne. And then I said to myself—if Becky would trust me, I could help her, perhaps, to understand him."

There was another pause; a bird, perching on the edge of a flower-pot in the balcony, sent a shrill chirp into the room. Becky drew the pitcher nearer, and laid her hot cheek on the cool blossoms. When she spoke it was in a reluctant voice.

"I don't quite understand him," she owned at last. "We met first at Mrs. Saunderson's a year ago, and somehow we seemed to get on. He told me about his early life in an old hall in Blankshire—a house with a haunted room and a long picture gallery. In those days it was believed that he would succeed to the estate; he was the rightful heir, you see, and the title would have been his if his uncle had not married again."

"I think I've heard something about his story," Carry remarked thoughtfully. "Old Sir John de Warrenne left two sons, and Edmund is the son of the younger. His father died, leaving him to the care of his uncle, Sir Luke de Warrenne, the present baronet. And Sir Luke petted the boy, and made much of him, as a bachelor uncle would be sure to do. But when Edmund was one or two-and-twenty, Sir Luke astonished everyone by marrying a young lady, and he has now a son of his own."

"Yes; Mrs. Saunderson was acquainted with the family," said Becky. "She was very sorry for Edmund; Lady Warrenne is extravagant, and Sir Luke doesn't allow him anything. He turned against his nephew after his marriage; and Edmund has only a small income derived from some property which came to him from his mother."

"Then he is a poor man," sighed Carry gently. "A little while ago I heard that he was secretary to a London company, and the company failed. Some people are so unfortunate. But, Becky, it is certain that he has paid you a great deal of attention."

"I have never spoken of his attentions," Becky answered.

"No, dear; but other folks talk. And I saw him hovering round you yesterday evening. Of course he likes you—that goes without saying—but one can't tell how deep the liking is: his feeling may be only on the surface, you know."

There was a footstep in the passage outside the door, and a clink of cups and saucers. Martha, a middle-aged woman of grave aspect, came in with the tea-tray, and set it on the table. Becky was glad of the interruption; just then she did not want to talk any more.

"Give me a cup of tea, Becky," her friend said. "I have only a minute to spare; but your tea is always so delicious that I can't resist it. I'm off to the Willingtons' this evening; they have a lot of people coming to-night, and I shall stop with them till Monday."

The ancient Town of Oakenbury was but a short distance from London, and Londoners came down very frequently to spend a Sunday there. Carry's friends, the Willingtons, lived in a country house near the railway station, and were supposed to entertain a smart set. Rumor said that their guests were noisy as well as smart, and tales of their doings sometimes caused the steady old townfolk to open their eyes. But Carry always explained that she met people at the Willingtons' who were likely to be useful—people who would talk about her as a rising singer, and spread abroad her fame. They were rich, too, and did not mind spending their money.

When the door had closed behind her, Becky drew a deep breath of relief. And then, looking round the room, her lips quivered, and she remembered that she had been very happy here only two months ago. Ever since Carry's return to Oakenbury she had been haunted by vague fears and fore-shadowings of sorrow to come. Only two months ago she had believed herself to be watched over and guided by a loving Father; but now she had lost herself in a maze of doubt. She was just what she had been before, a clever little governess, better off than most girls in her position—because a kind godmother had left her thirty pounds a year—and fond of her pupils and her work. Nothing had changed outwardly, but the interior peace was gone.

Until to-day she had not realized that Edmund Warrenne had become the chief interest in her life. She had never before looked steadily into the depths of her heart to see what was hidden there. But now that she knew her own secret, Carry's words had filled her with dismay. Suddenly her tears began to flow; she thought of her old childlike faith, and sank down on her knees to say a prayer.

When she rose, the feeling of trustfulness had come back again. There was the tea-pot, keeping hot under the pretty cosy which had been made by her own hands. She sat down thankfully to drink her tea, rejoicing in her solitude. Carry was a dear girl, of course, but she had a trick of upsetting people; and Becky was glad that her fair friend was not a fellow-lodger. Apartments were not expensive in the old grey house. The neighborhood was humble, but her landlady was a motherly soul, and Martha was always attentive and kind. She dried her tears, and resolved to run out of doors for a few minutes before settling down to study. Her pupils were advancing, and she had to keep ahead of them.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE BRACELET.

Becky opened the hall door, ran down the steps, and went out through the old iron gate which protected the front garden. Under the great chestnut trees the air was cool and sweet; a little group of children had gathered beneath their shade, and one toddler held up a headless wooden horse as an object of admiration. She paused to express pleasure at the sight of this interesting creature, and the child pointed out its charms with a fat finger. A lady, walking up the quiet street, smiled to herself at the girl and the tiny boy, and thought that they made a pretty picture. She was close to the chestnuts before Becky looked up and recognized her.

"Oh, Mrs. Saunderson, are you coming to call on me?" she said.

"Yes, dear; but we need not go indoors. I've just a few words to say. No, don't make me come in; I've been up to my eyes in business all day long. And you are rather pale; the fresh air will do you good."

"But I am quite well," protested Becky.

"I am sure that you are, so sure that I feel you will look your best on Wednesday at seven. We have asked two or three to dinner; Edmund Warrerie is coming—my husband likes him so much, you know. And I have written to your friend Miss Lancaster."

Becky's cheeks grew warm. "I shall be glad to come," she said. "You are always kind to me."

"I wish I could be kinder; sometimes I feel that mine is merely a life of good intentions, and very few of them are carried out. Why are we all so fearfully busy nowadays?"

"I don't know," Becky answered. "But I think our mothers and grandmothers used up all the leisure, and there is none left for us."

"Exactly my view," Mrs. Saunderson laughed, and turned away. "At seven, dear; don't forget! I told Burgess to call for me. I think I see him coming. Au revoir!"

Becky caught sight of a victoria crawling up the street; the coachman had been waiting at a shop door for parcels, while his mistress walked on. She knew all Mrs. Saunderson's ways very well, and admired the graceful carriage of the receding figure, dressed soberly in the latest style. How nice it must be to have plenty of money! Yes, but there was something in the other scale something which kept the balance even; the kind woman had sorrows which wealth could never make her forget. Becky had caught a glimpse of them once or twice, and felt thankful for her own humble lot.

She stayed out of doors for fifteen minutes; went to the nearest post office, and then returned to her quiet sitting-room. Mrs. Saunderson had always liked that room; Becky had adorned it in a quaint fashion, and the prevailing tint was a soft olive green, which rested the eyes and reminded one of an autumn wood. Ferns were always there, flowers were seldom wanting, but there was nothing costly to be found. The plain book-case held rows of students' books, and Becky's favorite poets took a conspicuous place; it was the home of a thoughtful woman, intent upon her work, and happy in doing it well.

She hoped that Carry would not come in before Wednesday. She did not want any of those suggestions, uttered of course in the kindest way, which were sure to upset a sensitive mind. Well, to-morrow was Sunday, and there would be time for reflection and repose.

Oakenbury was one of those rare towns where Sunday is still kept in the old-fashioned way. When Becky woke up in the morning, the early sunshine filled her little bedroom, and as she opened her window wide, the rustle of the chestnut leaves came in with a sweet, soothing sound. Everything spoke of peace; birds sang joyously, and when the bells began to chime, she remembered the childish days when she had walked to church, holding her mother's hand. Memories of a Christian home, of love, and faith and patience with the infirmities of others, came back to her in the first hours of the holy day. She was left alone in the world, and yet not alone, because there is no solitude for those who hear the voice of the Comforter, and take His words into the innermost heart.

The peaceful day passed without bringing Carry. Monday and Tuesday came and went; and on Wednesday Becky put on her simple evening dress without interruption. She wore some rich scarlet anemones in her soft cream-colored gown, and Mrs. Saunderson, when she welcomed her, thought that she had never looked so pretty before. Someone else thought so, too; Carry, who had arrived first, reluctantly acknowledged Becky's beauty, and sent a keen glance in the direction of Edmund Warrenne.

It was a small, friendly dinner; Edmund sat next to Becky and told her that he had something to show her by and by.

"Mrs. Saunderson asked me to bring it with me," he said. "It is a relic of bygone days; a bracelet which belonged to Henrietta Maria."

"The queen of Charles the First," Becky answered.

"Yes, she gave it to the wife of an ancestor of mine. And my uncle, Sir Luke, presented it to my mother in a fit of generosity, so it has come into my possession. It is the only historical souvenir that I can boast of."

"I hope there is a story attached to it," Becky said.

"There is; but I know little more than the outlines of the tale. My ancestor Edward de Warrenne, fell in love with a lady of Henrietta's household, and the queen favored his suit. But the course of true love proved rough indeed; De Warrenne went abroad just before the great tragedy was enacted at Whitehall, and his poor lady-love, left lamenting at home, received the bracelet as the last gift of her mistress. Years went by, before the parted couple met again; the bloom of youth was gone, but the love was of the kind that never fades; and when Charles the Second was proclaimed king, De Warrenne returned to England to marry his faithful betrothed. Tradition says that she wore the queen's bracelet on her bridal day. Since then it has been worn by one Lady de Warrenne after another, and they have been true spouses, every one."

Dinner came to an end; the ladies retired to the drawing-room, and the men soon joined them. Then Mrs. Saunderson, ever a tactful hostess, gathered a little group into a corner, and called upon Edmund to produce the bracelet.

Long afterwards Becky could recall every detail of that evening; she could remember the glass doors opening upon the verandah, the sweet scent of the plants in great majolica jars, the soft glow of the lingering daylight. The girls had drawn close to Edmund, and Carry was the first to take the bracelet from his hand. She stepped out on the verandah to see it better, and Becky and another lady followed her.

"Turquoises, pearls, and garnets, thickly set in a band of chased yellow gold—one can hardly believe that it belongs to the Stuart days," Carry said. "And yet it has an ancient look when one examines it. I like to think of the white arms it has clasped, and of the hearts that have throbbed near it! There—I can imagine myself a dame of olden time."

In an instant she had clasped the bracelet, and held out a white arm to show the effect. Becky thought that she looked very well at that moment. A hanging basket, overflowing with light foliage, swung just above her head.

almost touching the coils of pale gold hair, and the shrubs and the twilight sky made an effective background for the tall figure in the light blue dress. But Edmund, who knew the ways of the world, smiled at Carry Lancaster's "bit of show-off," and met an answering glance from quiet Miss Rayne, who was the third person in the group.

"Don't appropriate a family treasure," Miss Rayne remarked demurely. "Mr. Warrenne has not decided on the wearer, has he? Some day we shall know, I suppose."

"Some day," Edmund repeated, "some day I hope it will be worn by my bride!"

Carry was looking at him, but his gaze had sought Becky's face openly and with a slight smile full of tender meaning. Miss Rayne smiled, too; then Becky lifted her clear brown eyes, and saw just what he meant her to see. Very little more was said, but if Carry was annoyed, she showed nothing. She restored the bracelet to its owner, stepped back into the drawing-room, and spoke to the hostess, who asked her for a song.

She sang twice to everybody's satisfaction; the pink flush on her cheeks was very bright; she had never seemed in better spirits. But when it was time to separate, and Mr. Saunderson pleaded for one song more, she went across to the piano and gave them all a surprise. There was a brief prelude, and then, brilliantly, and almost recklessly, she burst into the old Scotch ballad:—

"O, Brignall banks are fresh and fair,  
And Greta woods are green  
I'd rather rove with Edmund there  
Than reign our English queen."

She had thrown so much spirit and meaning into her song that there was a momentary silence when it ended. Then they all thanked and praised her, but there was just a shade of reserve in the praise. The good-nights were spoken, and the guests departed.

The church clock chimed the quarter after ten as Becky's cab stopped at the gate of the grey house. She got out, and went quietly up to her room like a girl in a dream. Carry's behaviour had surprised and puzzled her; something in Mrs. Saunderson's face had expressed astonishment; and so to Edmund, she had been too shy to lift her eyes to his when she said good-night.

At the same time, Edmund Warrenne reached his lodging in rather a dreary mood. He was fresh from the presence of the girl he truly loved; but no sooner was he alone in his room than he realized the difficulty of his position. He had lost one post, and had not yet heard of another; funds were getting low; hope deferred was making the heart sick. He had no home to offer, no money to support a wife; and yet in a wordless fashion, he had plainly told the tale of his love.

"And there's poor old nurse to be considered," he said to himself, as he put out the light. "She has been my mother's most devoted servant, and the best friend that I've ever known. I must contrive to keep the dear old soul in comfort, let come what may!"

He slept soundly that night, but woke in the morning to take up his burden again. The sum paid monthly to Nurse Grantley was due to-day. He began to reckon as he rose and dressed, and presently felt for his purse. It was missing!

He searched calmly, refusing to believe in his own misfortune; but the truth had to be faced at last. His little store was gone!

## CHAPTER III.

### A GREAT SURPRISE.

A little while after that fruitless search, a young man with well-cut features and steel-grey eyes was walking rapidly along the principal street of the old town. His face was so stern, and his mouth was set in such a resolute curve, that he looked as if he had trampled every human feeling under his feet. Out of the High Street, he turned into another street where shops were few, and then paused for a moment before an old-fashioned bow-window filled with quaint silver and gold; valuable ornaments of a bygone day; necklaces, corals, bonbonnières, and chatelaines, not one of them of modern make. While he hesitated for a second or two on the doorstep, a young woman on the other side of the street was watching him unseen. She wore a smart brown coat, and coils of fair hair were twisted up under her straw hat. When he opened the door, she glided away, carrying a roll of music in her hand.

As he entered the old shop, a grey-haired man came out of an inner room, and bade him good-morning. Edmund Warrenne had come on an unpleasant errand; he colored up to his forehead as he produced the queen's bracelet.

"Yes, it is a genuine thing," said Mr. Myle, the old jeweller, examining it attentively. "Ah, yes, yes; we all know what necessity is. I'll make you as good an offer as I can, Mr. Warrenne, but there isn't much business done at present. Some of my best customers have died out."

Edmund left the shop with a heavy heart, carrying a smaller sum than he had expected to receive. Then he took his way to the outskirts of the town, walking as rapidly as he could, until he came to a row of small cottages, each divided from the road by its bit of front garden. Entering one of them, he opened the door without knocking, and a quavering voice from the front room called him by name.

"Come in, Mr. Edmund, I've been just longing for a glimpse of you," cried Nurse Grantley eagerly. "You've brought good news, I hope? No, I can read your face. Sit down, my dear boy."

She was a sweet old woman, with a face which had been pretty once, but was now like a wrinkled apple. Her white hair was arranged neatly under the cap; her work-basket was close to her side; everything in her poor little room betokened cleanliness and refinement.

"I'm an unlucky man," said Edmund wearily. "But it does me good to see you, nurse. You remind me of the bright old times, you know."

"Mr. Edmund"—the quavering voice grew firm—"the bright times will come again for us both. To you they will come in this life; for me they will begin again in the unseen world. I am getting very near that world, and I think I know what is to be. But what's amiss, dear? You always open your heart to me."

"It's a common trouble, nurse. I can't hear of a berth, and there isn't a gleam of light. You mustn't worry about me; something will turn up, I hope—and here's your money, dear old woman."

He laid the coins on the table by his side, and met the sorrowful gaze of her gentle blue eyes.

"My boy, you've had to part with something! You can never deceive me! You've given up a thing that you prized. What was it?"

"You have an uncanny power, nurse," he answered with a dreary smile. "Well, if you must know, it's only a bracelet—the bracelet which a queen gave to the promised bride of a De Warrenne long ago. My uncle Luke gave it

to my mother when I was a child. I liked the thing, and I thought that some day, perhaps, I might see it worn by—someone."

The old woman watched him earnestly in silence.

"Mr. Edmund," she said at last, "have you spoken to her, my dear?"

"How could I?" he asked.

"And is she dark, Mr. Edmund, or fair like your dear mother?"

"She has a sweet brown face, and beautiful brown eyes. There, nurse, I've talked nonsense enough. I'll let you know how I am getting on; and now, good-bye."

When he was gone, the old woman got stiffly out of her chair, knelt down, and prayed with all her might. That was all that she could do for "her boy"; and it was a great deal. Feeble as she was, she used a mighty power, and knew, in her own soul, that a divine voice was answering her pleading. She was too poor to pay the debt that she owed him; but God would pay it for her, and lift the heavy burden of gratitude and regret from her sorrowful heart.

Carry Lancaster was on her way to the house of a pupil when she caught sight of Edmund at the jeweller's shopdoor. As she passed through the street again, she paused before the bow-window, and felt an irresistible desire to find out Mr. Warrenne's business with the jeweller. She was very fond of pretty things, and there was an amethyst brooch set in pearls which would suit her well. She went into the shop, and asked the price of the brooch from Mr. Myle himself. The old man moved slowly, and while he was taking it out of the window, her glance fell on the glass case upon the counter. There, among a few old jewels, was the bracelet which she had clasped on her arm at Mrs. Saunderson's dinner-party.

"Ah, that bracelet," said the jeweller in answer to her question. "Yes, yes; it once belonged to the queen of Charles the First. Really, I can let you have it at quite a moderate price."

"I can't afford to buy it myself," replied Carry frankly. "But perhaps I can find a purchaser. I will see."

On the evening of the same day the Willingtons gave one of their private concerts. Miss Lancaster sang, and everyone said that she surpassed herself. She sang all the better, no doubt, because Mr. Seacombe was a listener, an old gentleman, very rich, and a great admirer of the songstress. Carry had a good deal of tact—the sort of tact which is generally used to gain a selfish end—and after some circumlocution she told him about the queen's bracelet.

She slept at the Willingtons' house that night, and gave vent to a burst of triumph in her own room.

"Becky shall never have the thing! I won't let her get the better of me! And so Edmund had to sell it—I was quite sure that he was poor! Well, I shall prepare a grand surprise for my Lady Becky Selwood!"

Poor Becky who had loved her old schoolfellow, and welcomed her to Oakenbury, had never even dreamt of the bitterness of Carry's jealousy. Her days passed as peacefully as usual; the birds perched on the little iron balcony to sing to her; the pitcher on her table was filled with the beautiful blossoms of the chestnuts, pink and creamy white; the afternoon sun shone into the pretty room while she lingered over her solitary tea-cup. Every day she was with her pupils from half-past nine till four; and on Saturday she had a whole half-holiday.

It was on a Saturday when Carry saw her again. She burst into the tranquil room like a gust of wind, and startled her quiet friend.

"How are you, dear?" she began. "I'm off to a garden party, and I want you to like my frock. Does heliotrope suit me as well as blue?"

She was elaborately dressed in soft silk with a good deal of loose filling, and wore a large black hat relieved by clusters of mauve flowers. With cheeks

tinged with vivid rose, and eyes shining with suppressed excitement, she looked brilliant, but not beautiful.

"Yes, that's quite a charming costume," Becky said.

"What a demure little thing you are!" cried Carry, laughing. "I wish you enjoyed yourself as much as I do. You sit here dreaming your life away. No, don't ring for another cup; I merely dropped in to peep at you."

"I do not dream until the day's work is over," answered Becky rather stiffly. "And I don't envy your enjoyments."

"Don't you? Well, as you are not envious, I'll show you something. Look at this."

She held up a hand delicately gloved in lilac kid, and displayed the well-remembered bracelet on her wrist.

"It tells its own story," she went on lightly. "Life is full of surprises, dear. Of late I have learnt that someone has fallen in love with me. And as I'm a woman with a warm heart, I can't help being glad."

Before Becky could speak, with a parting wave of the hand and a dazzling smile Carry was gone—gone, leaving a faint perfume of heliotrope behind, and a girl sitting mute and motionless as an image carved in stone.

She had known sorrow in the past, but this was a grief of a new kind. It was a sudden revelation of the falseness of one in whom she had believed, a blow which stunned her heart, and seemed to strike all the life out of her. How long she sat there in silence she did not know; but at last, with a great effort, she rose from her seat, rang the bell for Martha to remove the teatray, and made haste to get ready for a solitary walk.

The fresh air did her good, and cleared her brain; but in the time that came after, she remembered that strange ramble as part of an unhappy dream. Working-people passed her, rejoicing in Saturday's freedom; all the lovers in Oakenbury seemed to have turned out on purpose to parade their bliss. They hung upon each other's arms, and were as sweet and silly as it is possible for engaged couples to be. Poor Becky, in her miserable loneliness, felt as if their simple joy was almost an insult. She was single while all the rest were plural, every lassie had her laddie, while she was left to walk uncomforted by any mate.

And then as the fresh scent of the fields stole over her, and the clear tints of the evening sky began to charm her weary eyes, she thought of better things. "Rise above it all!" said that inner voice which speaks to Christian souls. "You may have a few more tedious miles to tread, but when you gain the end of the journey, you will think very little of the troubles of the way. You will pass from time, with its fleeting emotions, into an eternity where only the incorruptible will remain. For here you have no continuing habitation, but you seek one to come."

She was still a sad girl when she went back to her rooms, but the worst was over. Martha, who always observed her quietly, saw that she looked pale and tired, and felt a great longing to comfort her.

"You've had a fagging day, miss," she said. "I'd go to bed early if I were you. You didn't drink your tea, and you never had a morsel of my cake. It's a mistake for a lady to come rustling and bustling in, when another lady is sitting down in peace."

"Yes, Martha," Becky answered, trying to smile. "But we have to bear these worries, you see."

## CHAPTER IV.

### ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

The week went by without bringing a second visit from Carry Lancaster. As to Becky, there was nothing before her but patient continuance in well-doing, and she began to ask herself whether she had any right to fret at all. Edmund Warrenne had never definitely declared himself her lover; he was free to woo another woman, if he wished to do so. Only Becky knew that he had sought to win her, and Mrs. Saunderson knew it, too. So she must mutely bear one of those nameless wrongs which many a good woman has borne in meekness; and in endurance she found an unexpected strength.

When Saturday came round again, she wisely determined to take a real, long country walk. A word to Martha, and the tea came up quite half an hour earlier than usual. Becky made haste to be off and away, and so avoid a possible interview with Carry. At five o'clock she had left the house, and was following a quiet road which led her out of the old town.

At last coming to the gate of a wide field, she paused, and silently enjoyed the sight of buttercups and clover. Purple tassels and golden heads were all whispering and nodding in the gentle breath of the west wind. A narrow path ran along the field, close to the hedge, and Becky was tempted to open the gate, and go a-trespassing.

She had not gone far, when she was startled by something which looked like a heap of clothes, lying among the long grass. Coming nearer to the heap, she discovered that it was an old woman in a swoon, her poor, white face half hidden by the flowers of the field. Becky chanced to have some smelling-salts in her pocket; she bent over the woman, raising her tenderly, and doing all that she could to revive her. Soon she succeeded in calling her back to life; the dim eyes opened, and rested wonderingly on the serious young face above her.

"Is your home near?" Becky said. "Do you think you can walk a little way?"

"Yes, dear, yes; I can walk if you'll help me," said Nurse Grantley, making a great effort to rise.

Becky supported her carefully, leading her down the field-path to the gate, and out into the road. The old woman pointed to a row of pretty little cottages and her new friend conducted her to the tiny dwelling at the end of the row. A young woman, with a child in her arms, met them at the gate.

"Oh, Mrs. Grantley, you've been taken faint again!" cried she. "Now just sit down quietly in your old chair, and I'll make you a cup of tea in a minute. Thank you, miss, for bringing her home."

"Let me come in with her," Becky said. "I can take off her bonnet, and get her quite tidy again, you know. The poor bonnet is sadly crushed, you see."

She felt drawn towards the gentle old woman, who was so trustful and grateful. Nurse Grantley had never been so daintily touched and set to rights; the small, slender fingers smoothed her hair, and put her cap on her weary head. And Becky found infinite comfort in ministering to this lonely creature. While her hands were busy with that frail body, another Hand, invisible and wonderfully tender, was touching her own bruised heart, and giving ease and peace. When we occupy ourselves with the troubles of others, God always concerns Himself with us and our affairs: and so in one way or another, the comforters are sure to be comforted.

When the tea was brought, the old woman was quite ready for a chat. She had neither son, nor daughter, she said, but there was one who was as dear as a son. He had been her nursling, and he was providing for her in her old age. A gentleman, too, and ought to have been a baronet, that he ought! But he had been terribly worried lately, and had gone away to London, to find something to do. She was hoping every day to get a note, telling good news; times were bad, she supposed, and she didn't understand much about business herself.

"It's hard," she went on, "to see a good man suffer, while the wicked are prospering all round him. If ever my boy marries, he'll make just one of the best husbands in the world. Not a bit selfish! Why, what do you think he has done for his poor old nurse? Parted with a thing he prized greatly, a beautiful thing, too, which was a family treasure, hundreds of years old."

Becky, sitting in the opposite chair, felt the hot color rush over her face, and then die away, leaving her very still and cold. Presently she tried to speak, and the voice that she heard sounded curiously unlike her own.

"May I ask what the treasure was?" she said.

"A bracelet, my dear—a bracelet that a queen gave to a lady who married a forefather of his. And somebody stole the dear fellow's money, just when he wanted it most, and he sold the very thing that he wanted to keep. Oh, it's very hard," added the old dame, a spot of red coming into each wrinkled cheek. "He has his hope and his love, like other men, and he opened his heart to Nurse Grantley."

"Do you mind telling me something?" asked Becky in that queer new voice of hers. "Is it possible—I mean—can he be Mr. Edmund de Warrenne?"

Nurse Grantley gazed at her for a moment in silence; and then there came to her a sudden flash—a something that was almost inspiration.

"She has a sweet brown face and beautiful brown eyes," she repeated to herself. Aloud she said, "Yes, miss, his name is Edward de Warrenne."

"And he sold the bracelet because he wanted money; he did not give it to anyone as a—love gift?"

"No, miss, but there is a lady he meant to give it to. He was hoping for better days, when he could speak his mind."

"And the lady he thought of—to forgive me for asking questions—is she very tall, and very fair, with golden hair?"

"No, miss, she is a brown lady. He said so."

"Then someone has misrepresented him," remarked Becky, getting up. "A fair lady is wearing his bracelet. It is a mystery, but I suppose it will be cleared up one day. Now you have talked enough, and I must leave you."

"You'll come to see me again, my dear," said Nurse Grantley persuasively. "And you'll be so kind as to tell me your name."

"I am Becky Selwood, a little governess, all alone in the world. Mr. de Warrenne meets me sometimes at Mrs. Saunderson's house. Good-bye, Mrs. Grantley, I will come again on Saturday afternoon."

She went out of the cottage into the cool light of the May evening, and paused once more at the gate to see the buttercups and clover. What a wide expanse of amethyst and gold! How sweet the air was, and what a fair, flowery earth she lived on! Becky was ashamed of her depression, but she felt all at once that she was an ignorant little girl, unacquainted with the world's ways, and very easily deceived. Carry Lancaster had been amusing herself at her friend's expense; that was all. Her instinct led her to trust Nurse Grantley, and distrust Carry.

When she was gone, Nurse Grantley's cheery young landlady came to remove the tea-things, and see how she fared. She found the old woman with a blotter, a few sheets of notepaper, a pen, and a penny bottle of ink. She was beginning to write a letter.

"Oh, Mrs. Grantley, I know you are a good scholar," the landlady said, "but are you well enough to write?"

"Bless you, my dear, I'm well enough for anything," was the ready answer; and the letter was written in peace.

Becky went back to her rooms with a holiday feeling in her heart. She carried a sheaf of long grass and buttercups, and arranged them loosely in her favorite pitcher. They lasted long enough to gladden her through the hours of a quiet Sunday, and when the afternoon was nearly over, she was surprised at hearing footsteps in the corridor.

"I hope it isn't Carry," she said to herself.

No, it was not Carry; it was Mrs. Saunderson.

"Here you are, alone in your pretty bower," her friend said. "Becky, you may give me a cup of tea; for once I have an hour to spare. Oh, the buttercups!"

"They make me feel like a child," Becky remarked gaily. "I remember the days when I filled my pinafore with them."

"They make me feel like an old woman," Mrs. Saunderson answered. "It is a long, long time since I had my pinafore on, but you have never taken off yours, Becky."

They both laughed: Becky hoped that she wasn't quite a baby, but confessed a liking for childish things.

Tea came upstairs, and Mrs. Saunderson admired the shape of the white china cups, and coveted the brown earthenware teapot; everything was pretty; things need not be hideous because they are cheap. It was evident that Becky had the art of making a little money do a great deal. So the rich, married woman appreciated the thrifty maiden, and sat drinking her tea in sweet content.

"Mrs. Willington called yesterday with one of her girls," said Mrs. Saunderson, enjoying a second cup. "What funny people they are! They seem to exist to give concerts and dramatic entertainments, and anybody who doesn't sing, or play, or act, is a nobody. They have always been enthusiastic about Miss Lancaster, you know."

"Yes," Becky answered.

"They tell me that she is going to marry old Mr. Seacombe. She wished to conceal the engagement for the present; but he has announced it himself with great satisfaction. They settled the matter after she had been singing at the Willingtons'; about a fortnight ago. Have you seen her lately?"

"No," said Becky. "But—do you think she will be happy?"

"Happy is not the word," Mrs. Saunderson responded. "She will have a very good time in her own way. You don't understand her in the least, my dear; she is the most earthy woman I have ever met, and I've known a good many. We thought she was rather jealous of you."

"Oh, I daresay she will drop me," said Becky comfortably, as her friend rose to go.

She did not look as if she cared about being dropped. Mrs. Saunderson patted her smooth cheek, and said that it was quite refreshing to have had a glimpse of her.

A few days passed by, and then Carry herself came to call on Becky Selwood. She entered the olive-green room with a swish of soft draperies, and looked taller and more important than she had ever been before. Becky welcomed her at once, and openly congratulated her on the engagement.

"I wanted to keep it a secret for a little while," Carry said, with a furtive glance at the other's happy face. "But Mr. Seacombe is so absurdly glad that he insisted on telling everybody."

"How kind he must be!" exclaimed Becky. "Wasn't it sweet of him to buy Mr. de Warrenne's bracelet, and give it to you? And I think you would value it all the more, if you knew that Mr. de Warrenne sold it to get some money for a poor old friend."

In that moment the two girls seemed to have changed places. Becky, cool, smiling, and secure, was quite a woman of the world. Carry, startled, was shaken out of her usual composure. A pang of envy shot through her heart, and she felt mean and small beside the unsophisticated little governess.

"It was a sacrifice of course," she said stiffly. "Mr. Seacombe was with me in a jeweller's shop one day, and we saw the bracelet there. He wants to load me with ornaments, but I won't let him give me too many. Now, Becky, I must say adieu, for I am going to meet him at the Willingtons'."

It was a very brief visit, never repeated. The preparations for the wedding were hastened to please the bridegroom; and, as the bride had no near relations, she was to be married from the Willingtons' house. Becky did not receive an invitation; but before the wedding-day came, a letter was written to her, which altered the whole aspect of her life.

The letter was from Edmund de Warrenne, and it told her the secret which had already been confided to his old nurse. He loved her; he had succeeded in getting another secretaryship, but the pay was small. Had she love and patience enough to wait until he could provide a home? Yes, she had; and Mrs. Saunderson rejoiced in her quiet happiness. So that memorable summer glided away, and Nurse Grantley was laid to rest when the leaves fell.

One morning when Becky entered her sitting-room, she realized all at once that winter had verily come. December had been only a continuation of autumn; but here was a bitter January day; snow was driving fast against the window, and the little iron balcony, where the birds used to perch and sing, was covered with white. But the table was not left uncheered by a touch of green; the quaint pitcher was filled with shiny laurels, for flowers there were none. A letter from Edmund lay on Becky's plate, and although the birds were silent, her heart began to chant its song of thanksgiving. She was not afraid of the snow; presently, well shielded with mackintosh and umbrella, she would go to her pupils. Life was full of blessings; love's steady light was shining on the daily path; and there was not a happier girl in Oak-enbury than Becky Selwood.